

Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP)
DSU Update
Michigan Council for Rehabilitation Services (MCRS)
Thursday, November 10, 2022

Director Comments:

FY23 represents a fiscal year without pandemic restrictions and builds off momentum of increasing referrals and numbers of participants. BSBP management will be meeting November 17th to review the successes of FY22, the challenges ahead and to discuss key initiatives to guide formulation of calendar year 2023 goals and objectives. It is clear that we must commit ourselves to the continued pursuit of excellence in order to serve our internal and external customers. During FY22, challenges in the area of staffing across the agency resulted in the need to explore efficiencies in the conduct of our business. BSBP itinerant staff adjusted to home as official work station while others returned to in-person or hybrid work. To facilitate these new work environments and address staff shortages, BSBP leveraged investments in its cloud-based technologies – Libera System 7, BEP System 7 module, Libera Insights Data Analytics Platform, YesLMS training platform, Citrix ShareFile document management and e-signature platform and PowerDMS policy management platform. BSBP continues to employ MS Teams and Zoom for internal and external meetings. Feedback from staff remains positive as BSBP continues to refine and discover new use cases for these platforms. Meeting our internal customer needs is critical to meeting our external customer needs. Looking forward, BSBP plans to retool and rethink the way we serve external customers. From the implementation of a new case management system to training for excellence and quality assurance, we will concentrate on the customer experience.

BSBP budget:

For the period ending 9/30/2022, BSBP’s budget remained on plan. BSBP was adequately matched with State funding to allow it to fully access its FY22 federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) grant award and Independent Living (IL) grants. Those grants for FY22 were as follows:

VR	\$17,993,738
ILOIB	\$ 998,139
IL Part B	\$ 188,539

Grants for FY23 are as follows and represent the amount released per the Congressional Budget Continuing Resolution keeping the government running through December 16, 2022:

VR	\$ 4,039,887
ILOIB	\$ 207,420
SE – Adult	\$ 6,388
SE – Youth	\$ 6,388

Pre-ETS:

MRS and BSBP continue to coordinate their pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) reserve and expend requirement. This is a State mandate. Each State must reserve and expend a minimum of 15% of its VR Grant on Pre-ETS. As of 9/30/22, BSBP’s FY21 unexpended Pre-ETS reserve was estimated at \$346,813. In order for the State to be in compliance with the FY21 Pre-ETS spending requirement, MRS moved an additional \$350,000 of Pre-ETS spending to FY21.

FFY 22 Year-end closeout:

LEO Accounting is still settling the books for FY22. While the precise dollar amounts are not presently determined, BSBP anticipates entering into FY23 with substantial FY22 carryover funding from all 3 categories of funding listed above and will have until 9/30/2023 to expend these resources. In addition, BSBP will receive FY23 federal awards for Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind (ILOIB), Supported Employment and Independent Living Part B. BSBP has received notice from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) that it will receive a 6.3% increase in VR funding (approximately \$900,000 increase) for an anticipated total of \$19,133,716 (inclusive of the 15% Pre-ETS reserve). BSBP expects to have adequate match available to fully draw down the increased federal VR award.

Field Services Division (FSD) – Lisa Kisiel, Division Director and MCRS Liaison

FSD consists of itinerant services to adults participating in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB), Independent Living Part B (IL-Part B); and, services to students and youth participating in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Youth Low Vision Services (YLV).

This FSD report is for the period July 1 to September 30, 2022, and represents the 4th Quarter of FY22 and the 1st Quarter of Program Year (PY) 2022.

Key Data

Description	Q4 FY22 Q1 PY22 7/01/22-9/30/22	Q4 FY21 Q1 PY21 7/01/21-9/30/21	Change
Active VR customers	915	818	11.86% increase
Eligibility determinations	90	53	69.81% increase
Competitive Integrated Employment	17	9	88.89% increase
Benefits Planning and Counseling	57	46	23.91% increase
Average hourly wage	\$21.70	\$16.36	32.64%

In FY22, BSBP assisted 68 individuals in obtaining competitive integrated employment (CIE). Last fiscal year (2021), BSBP assisted 56 individuals in obtaining CIE.

BSBP celebrated its Excellence Awards on October 14th, 2022. This was a virtual event where BSBP celebrated successfully employed individuals, community partners, businesses, students, and older individuals who are blind.

FSD met and exceeded a FY22 goal of providing benefits planning & counseling services to its customers. BSBP's goal was 120 and 128 benefits planning and counseling services were provided.

FSD Adult Services Highlights:

- BSBP and MRS continue to coordinate educating business about the services and tools available to them when hiring individuals with disabilities. This collaboration also includes work force partners and

includes a webinar series focused on topics such as apprenticeships, Veteran services, Agriculture, and manufacturing just to name a few.

- BSBP and MRS continue a commitment to the Customized Employment (CE) project, including a third Griffin-Hammis and Associates/Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) training, to include rehabilitation professionals and providers.

FSD Challenges:

- Hiring for open positions in the Central and West Regions
- Training and onboarding new staff

Pre-ETS Highlights:

- Student numbers at the end of September 30, 2022: 319 students who can receive Pre-ETS services, 94 being served as Potentially Eligible and 225 being served with a VR case open.
- Planning for implementation of FY23 Pre-ETS programs both in-person and virtual
- Family Engagement training and outreach activities-December 2022
- Inclusion Community Advocacy Networking (iCan) new program to promote self-advocacy, networking and accessing resources in the community. Four sessions throughout the year.
- MDE-LIO and BSBP continuation of joint programming focused on career exploration and financial literacy that was so successful last fiscal year.

Pre-ETS Challenges:

- Referrals to programs continues to be a challenge.

Other FSD Noteworthy items:

- BSBP entered into a technical assistance agreement with the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center - Quality Employment (VRTAC-QE) to enhance and promote Supported Employment (SE) services. This agreement will focus on training, for staff and community providers. BSBP's launch date was October 25th. Counselor and management on-line training modules are currently in the process of completion; followed by Q&A with the VRTAC-QE; and a provider and counselor in person training beginning January 23, 2023.

VR Priorities for FY23

- Customized Employment Pilots
- Supported Employment (VRTAC-QE providing technical assistance)
- Individualized Plans for Employment (focus is on quality and appropriate vocational goals and services)
- Benefits Planning and Counseling
- Preparing for migration to Libera’s Informed case management system
- CSNA needs assessment
- Financial Literacy Instruction

FSD Pre-ETS Priorities for FY23

- Credential Attainment and MSG for Pre-ETS
- Development and Implementation of Statewide programs
- Coordination with MDE-LIO
- Support of Regional Programs
- Provider partnerships to enhance outreach and targeted services
- Benefits planning and counseling
- Financial literacy programming
- Program monitoring and communication of policies

BSBP Training Center (TC) - Juan Ortiz, Division Director

BSBP Training Center Fiscal Year Census Data. 3-year census data; FY20-21 and FY 22.

BSBP Training Center 3-year enrollment overview

	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22
Total Served:	156	145	193

Other TC highlights:

- Summer youth programs held at the TC went well overall. The last youth program was a STEM camp held in August and received many accolades from parents and students.
- TC held the largest to-date two-day Community Partner Day Event on

June 25. Representatives from nine different Community Rehab Partners descended on the training center to learn about services, trainings, and adaptive techniques to better serve individuals with visual impairments.

- In July, the TC partnered with WD and MRS to host a WD Equal Opportunity training at the TC campus which included statewide EO Officers from Michigan Works Association.
- New Referral Form launched on August 12.
 - This new Referral Form will save significant time for completing referrals to residential training.
 - New metrics collected from new referral form
 - New referral form comes with automated follow up reminders
- Employment Readiness Checklist was launched August 29. The form will improve tracking of participant progress while in programming at the Training Center and help identify areas of continued support as participants return home. The checklist will also improve communication between the Training Center and Field Services Divisions as well as help track 911 reporting requirements.
- BSBP Training Center provided 176 financial literacy training opportunities to FSD customers receiving services at the TC during FY22.

Pre-Employment Transition Services Programming at the Training Center:

- Culinary Weekend Program
- Survivor Weekend Program
- Post-Secondary Readiness Program
- Introduction to Workplace Readiness
- Vision Forward
- In-Person Parent Engagement Open House
- STEM Camp

TC Challenges:

- Backfilling open positions has required creative scheduling and solutions, such as substitute teachers, student assistants, and additional overtime authorizations. Although the majority of positions are now filled.
- Training and onboarding new staff
- Participant referrals continue to increase steadily as evident this FY with the highest year for individuals served within the last 3 years.

- FY 22 brought an uptick on the total number of IL participants served when compared to previous years.

Other TC Noteworthy:

- Mini-Adjustment Program was held at the TC August 22, 2022
- Pre-ETS Survivor- work readiness weekend Camp was held during the weekend of September 9.
- Mini-Adjustment Program taking place in Mt. Pleasant week of November 13th.
- Pre-ETS Culinary weekend program with the local community college (KVCC) is scheduled for the weekend of November 18. This program is a joint collaboration between the Pre-ETS Unit and the training center.

Administrative Services Division – Mike Pemble, Director

Modernization:

BSBP obtained a one-time State of MI IT Innovation Fund allotment of \$588,400 several years ago, which has since been fully matched with Federal VR funds to total \$2,547,381 for the distinct purpose of modernizing BSBP's IT resources to use current technology to create organizational efficiency.

BSBP continues to implement its multi-year IT Modernization Project. Presently, BSBP is working with its contractor, Libera, Inc., on an upgrade to its Business Enterprise Program Case Management System that will streamline some manual processes, adding to the efficiency of the program. Data classification and system security tasks have been completed and BSBP was provided with the Authority to Operate the system by the State of Michigan Chief Security Officer as of 10/28/22. The project completion date is projected to be on or before 12/31/22.

Current developments:

- The new Operator Web Portal for the automated submission of Vending Facility Monthly Reports and generation of Set Aside Fee bills was successfully integrated on 9/1/22. All licensees were able to submit their reports and generate their Set Aside Fee bills using this system for the August 2022 Vending Facility Monthly Report.

- Licensed Operators within the BEP are eligible to participate in the State retirement system. A new component has been added to the Case Management System to automate the monthly calculation of retirement contributions as well as the adjustment reports required by the Office of Retirement Services. These updates will facilitate the required reporting to the Office of Retirement Services without the need for manual calculations and will reduce the time required for completion. All testing of this process has been successfully completed and the automated retirement feature is scheduled to go live on 11/11/22.
- In order to ensure that BEP Promotional Agents are accurately and appropriately completing Site Visits with licensees, audits are conducted for each region on a monthly basis. Part of the upgrade will allow for the audits of these site visits to be retained within the system and require three levels of management approval. This functionality has been successfully tested and is scheduled to go live on 11/11/22.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP):

- The BEP licensed operator training class started on August 15, 2022 and is proceeding. Two of the three initial candidates have completed the in-class training as well as the two weeks of practical training at the BSBP Training Center. Currently, these candidates are participating in their first On-the-Job Experience. Candidates are on track to be eligible to bid on available facilities early in calendar year 2023.
- The BEP has successfully reopened all Vending Facilities that had been closed due to the pandemic. This includes incorporating 15 micro market self-checkout kiosks into facilities to improve efficiency and decrease labor costs.
- BEP has actively participated with the Elected Operator Committee to reconfigure the sites in the greater Detroit area to retain two viable vending facilities. Many vending sites have been permanently closed due to the pandemic and the remaining locations have been combined to create the two new facilities. Each location consists of one micro market and several remaining vending sites.

Braille Talking Book Library (BTBL)

The BTBL machine services section participated in a pilot project designed by the National Library Service (NLS) to better track the inventory of repaired digital talking book machines. BTBL machine services staff worked on the inventory from August 1-5 for a total of 63 hours. BTBL had 2,668 machines that they tracked with only 37 that were marked as lost. After submitting our stats to NLS on August 10, NLS found our results very helpful. Representatives from the NLS machine section are planning an on-site visit to BTBL to review the machine inventory in person. However, the date has not been finalized.

BTBL Challenges:

BTBL has just submitted its annual Readership, Circulation, and Book Reader surveys to NLS. We had a slight decline in the audio book circulation from fiscal year 2021 to 2022.

Fiscal year 2021 circulation: 835,075

Fiscal year 2022 circulation: 784,374

A challenge BTBL faces is a declining patron population. For fiscal year 2022, our patron count is 7,907. This number reflects an increase over FY 2021 when the patron count was 6,943. However, a perceived trend in Michigan and across the country is that patron numbers may be trending down. In order to maintain a strong patron participation rate in Michigan, BTBL is implementing the following initiatives with the FY23 goal to increase its patron count by 10%:

- Outreach to both the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) and Veterans Employment Services (VES) to promote BTBL services with the goal of attracting more veterans to BTBL's service.
- Partnering with LEO Employment & Training Communication Services to place paid ads on the BTBL Facebook page with the goal of reaching more potential patrons. We have developed metrics to determine success of this project.

Director Bureau-wide Initiatives via the Training Innovation Policy and Procedure (TIPP) Unit

- Training (VRTAC-QE)

- Quality and Assurance (monthly reports out of Libera Data Insights – informs areas of concern and training opportunities)
- PowerDMS (exceeding initial goals)
- YesLMS (pausing new courses to focus on Supported Employment trainings, adjusted for business unit needs and also recalibrated number of courses assigned to new hires)
- Citrix ShareFile (New use case is the collaboration feature which is how this document was prepared, working on ideal folder setup for each field office, working with each business unit on new use cases)
- Presented an overview of what Citrix ShareFile and PowerDMS can do for staff and time savings that results to the CSAVR in person conference last week.

Wrap-up and questions – Bill Robinson, Bureau Director